

Bernstein & Vaughan Williams

Saturday, March 10 – 8 pm

William Eddins, conductor

Andrew Wan, violin

Symphony Prelude, 7 pm on the Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby with D.T. Baker

BERNSTEIN

Fancy Free: Three Dance Variations

(7')*

BERNSTEIN

Serenade for Violin (after Plato's Symposium)

(31')*

Phaedrus. Pausanias (Lento – Allegro)

Aristophanes (Allegretto)

Eryximachus (Presto)

Agathon (Adagio)

Socrates: Alcibiades (Molto tenuto – Allegro molto vivace)

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Five Variants on "Dives and Lazarus"

(11')*

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Symphony No. 8 in D minor

(29')*

Fantasia (Variazioni senza tema): Moderato

Scherzo alla Marcia (per stromenti a fiato): Allegro alla Marcia

Cavatina (per stromenti ad arco): Lento espressivo

Toccata: Moderato maestoso

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

Fancy Free: Three Dance Variations

Leonard Bernstein

(b. Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1918 / d. New York, 1990)

First performance of the ballet: April 18, 1944 in New York

The ESO performed the ballet suite, including the Three Dance Variations, in March 2012.

“Three sailors explode on stage. They are out on shore leave, looking for excitement, women, drink, and any kind of fun they can stir up. Right now they are fresh, full of animal exuberance.” So began the sketchy outline an ambitious young dancer with New York’s Ballet Theater dreamt up for a dance he wanted to create. But before Jerome Robbins could bring it to life, he needed a composer. Vincent Persichetti turned it down, but suggested Robbins try a young firebrand named Leonard Bernstein.

It was an auspicious time for Bernstein. In 1943, he had conducted the New York Philharmonic in an acclaimed concert broadcast throughout the United States. Just weeks before the ballet premiered, his “*Jeremiah*” *Symphony* had also won accolades. With the success Bernstein would enjoy with Robbins in the ballet that would become *Fancy Free*, “Lenny” was now one of America’s hottest musical figures.

The Three Dance Variations from *Fancy Free* take place as a showcase toward the ballet’s conclusion, at which each of the sailors dance their own number to impress two young ladies: a galop, a waltz, and a danzon. The high-spirited ballet was successful enough that it was later expanded upon, and became another hit stage show: *On the Town*.

Serenade, after Plato’s Symposium

Bernstein (see above)

First performance of the work: September 9, 1954 in Venice

Last ESO performance: September 2008

Bernstein wrote his *Serenade for Solo Violin, String Orchestra, Harp and Percussion, after Plato’s Symposium* for Isaac Stern. And while he avoided a literal casting of the work into musical forms, insisting the work was inspired by a re-reading of Plato’s work Bernstein had done, the composer did leave the following detailed description of each movement:

I. Phaedrus; Pausanias (Lento; Allegro). Phaedrus opens the symposium with a lyrical oration in praise of Eros, the god of love. (Fugato, begun by the solo violin). Pausinias continues by describing the duality of lover and beloved. This is expressed in a classical sonata-allegro, based on the material of the opening fugato.

II. Aristophanes (Allegretto). Aristophanes does not play the role of clown in this dialogue, but instead that of the bedtime story-teller, invoking the fairytale mythology of love.

III. Erixymachus (Presto). The physician speaks of bodily harmony as a scientific model for the workings of love-patterns. This is an extremely short fugato scherzo, born of a blend of mystery and humor.

IV. *Agathon (Adagio)*. Perhaps the most moving speech of the dialogue, Agathon's panegyric embraces all aspects of love's powers, charms and functions. This movement is a simple three-part song.

V. *Socrates; Alcibiades (Molto tenuto; Allegro molto vivace)*. Socrates describes his visit to the seer Diotima, quoting her speech on the demonology of love. This is a slow introduction of greater weight than any of the preceding movements; and serves as a highly developed reprise of the middle section of the Agathon movement, thus suggesting a hidden sonata-form. The famous interruption by Alcibiades and his band of drunken revellers ushers in the Allegro, which is an extended Rondo ranging in spirit from agitation through jig-like dance music to joyful celebration. If there is a hint of jazz in the celebration, I hope it will not be taken as anachronistic Greek party-music, but rather the natural expression of a contemporary American composer imbued with the spirit of that timeless dinner-party.

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Five Variants on "Dives and Lazarus"

Ralph Vaughan Williams

(b. Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, 1872 / d. London, 1958)

First performed: June 10, 1939 in New York

Last ESO performance: May 2003

The song which serves as the basis of Vaughan Williams' set of "variants" is here known by the title *Dives and Lazarus* – an old folksong based on a Biblical story of a rich man and a poor one, the former finding damnation while the latter attains salvation. For Vaughan Williams, the folksongs he collected and archived throughout his life served many purposes. He was determined to preserve them, first and foremost, and while he found inspiration in them for his own music, it was not always by directly quoting them in his pieces.

Of the *Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus,"* which premiered in 1939 under the baton of Adrian Boult, Vaughan Williams said, "These variants are not replicas of traditional tunes, but rather reminiscences of various versions in my own collection and those of others." The tune at the heart of these wonderfully gentle, pastoral variations is known by other names besides *Dives and Lazarus*. It has been sung as a Christmas carol with the words, "Come all ye faithful Christians," while in Ireland it is called *The Star of the County Down*. Other versions exist too, and in fact, another setting of it was performed at Vaughan Williams' own funeral at Westminster Abbey in 1958. The piece is set for strings, plus a harp – though two harps are preferable, the composer said.

Symphony No. 8 in D minor

Vaughan Williams (see above)

First performed: May 2, 1956 in Manchester

Last ESO performance: October 1993

Vaughan Williams' penultimate symphony premiered when the composer was 86 years old, at a time when the musical cognoscenti were embracing ever newer and innovative ideas. So this work – his shortest and, in many ways, rather backward-looking symphony – was dismissed at its early performances. Yet for a man treated more as an anachronism, the venerable octogenarian still managed a number of fascinating and unique touches in this work.

Instrumentation is the most obvious of these. The second movement is scored entirely for winds; the third movement for strings alone. And in the finale, Vaughan Williams makes use of a greatly expanded percussion section, "all available hitting instruments which can make definite notes," he said at the time. The opening movement is a Fantasia or, as he noted drily, "Seven variations in search of a theme." As each succeeding variation spills out from the one before, the same core elements are clearly distinguishable, but each in a completely new pattern.

Contrast externally between the second and third movements is readily apparent, but is also within the second movement as well. Three themes are dominant, as is a fugato right before the bucolic Trio. The strings-only third movement is called a Cavatina, and is largely serene, despite a noticeable passage of heightened tension following a brief solo violin section.

The percussion-laden final movement's first main passage is for trumpet; another is for horns and strings. The large battery of hit-upon instruments ("all the 'phones and 'spiels I could think of," Vaughan Williams said) are not employed for mere effect, but aids in building to a magnificent, even heroic conclusion – in all, a much sunnier symphony than either of the more dramatic ones on either side of it in the Vaughan Williams canon.

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